



SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

Bois Content Primary and Infant School



Bois Content, St. Catherine



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Overview/ Background

In 2017, the Bois Content Basic School along with the Crawl Pen Basic School merged and became the infant arm of the now Bois Content Primary and Infant School. In 2019, a building was donated by the Helping Hands Jamaica Foundation, their donor partner NFL Cornerback Nevin Lawson, Lady Jane's Haircuts For Men & Wicked Awesome Wishes; built with local implementing partner Food For The Poor to house the infants.



Staff and infants of the Bois Content Primary and Infant School are all smiles standing in front of their newly-constructed infant department.

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Testimonials

Mrs. Camilla Walsh-Reynolds, Principal of the Bois Primary and Infant School is a visionary and motivator who inspires her staff to excel and achieve greatness. Upon entering the institution in September 2017, Mrs. Walsh-Reynolds, a former primary school teacher started the infant arm of the school because, “In making preparations to start my new role as principal, I did a walk through in the community to investigate the reason students entering the institution were not ready for the grade one curriculum. Following this activity and after meeting with the heads of the Bois Content Basic School and Crawl Pen Infant, it was realized that [a] merger was needed and so it became official and accepted by all parties involved.”



Principal, Mrs. Camilla Walsh-Reynolds is all smiles exemplifying her gratitude to donors who gifted the Bois Content Primary and Infant School including her new office space.

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Sharing the alarming results from her walk through in the community, Mrs. Walsh-Reynolds said, “During the first three weeks of school, the grade one students were assessed by the Ministry of Education and the results were disturbingly poor. It was discovered that, approximately eighty percent (80%) of our students were not ready for the grade one curriculum. This meant that they were not reading, among other issues. After having one-on-one interactions with parents, they shared that their main issue was the inability to pay the tuition fees required by basic schools in the area. As a result, students were not sent to school as often as required and the inconsistency affected their performance academically. With that knowledge, I knew that once an infant department was created at Bois Content Primary, this issue would no longer plague the students as parents would only be required to pay for lunch. Additionally, students would be taught by trained teachers and that was also another important factor.”

In preparation for the infants, Mrs. Walsh-Reynolds and her team tried their best to make the cottage at the school ready for the students. Unfortunately, after a visit from the Ministry of Education, the building was deemed unfit to house the infants. Administrators went ahead and rearranged a few classrooms and the infants were then housed in classrooms also occupied by the grade three (3) students. As the population of the infants grew, students began to occupy two other classrooms, displacing the grade two (2) and three (3) classes.

Explaining the situation with the infants being housed by the primary school, Mrs. Walsh-Reynolds shared, “The space was inadequate, very small and lacked proper ventilation. The babies were hot and miserable. Thankfully, we had supportive and understanding parents. Realizing that these issues were not conducive to proper learning and teaching protocols and due to the financial constraints, I approached Food For The Poor, for help.

She went on to say, “We also lost use of our Mathematics room, as it was turned into a classroom. Our Mathematics room, which was also a gift donated, was used to host pull-out sessions. These sessions gave us the opportunity to have one-on-one lessons with students who were not performing at their grade level. Due to the lack of space, that initiative was put on hold to facilitate the infants. We started with this vision in 2017 with 27 children. Today, we have a total of 52 students in our infant department and it is

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growing. We realized that every week we were registering new students. I do believe by September 2020 we will be looking at an enrolment figure of 100 students.”

Since the intervention of the infant department, Mrs. Walsh-Reynolds shared that the school has not only seen an increase in enrolment, but their current 5-year-old students have improved in their reading. “So, we know that this batch of students who will be entering grade one in September 2020 will perform exceptionally well.

Reminiscing on the process of receiving the building, Mrs. Walsh-Reynolds’, happiness could not be hidden. With a broad smile, she shared, “My teachers and I were elated when we received the call that we would get the building. We knew it would create a great impact. Living and growing up in the Spanish Town environs, I knew that once Food For The Poor was on board, we would be great. Construction began in the summer and I remember the contractor said to me, ‘Miss, the fact that we are here measuring, means that you are getting your school.’ After those words, tears were just flowing. Soon after that meeting, the trucks arrived with construction materials. The excitement was not only evident on our faces but also on faces of the children and the community members. It was something different, something they’ve never experienced before. When the two buses drove in with the volunteers, it was just an amazing feeling. The look on everyone’s faces was simply priceless.



Principal, Mrs. Camilla Walsh-Reynolds (center), sharing a photo with her staff who are happy to be operating in their own building. (From Left) Carlett Bedward, Lara Heron, Nicole Gordon, and Daneki McCalla-Reader.

On the day of the opening, it brought tears to my eyes, because I knew how comfortable the children and my teachers were going to be and I envisioned how well my students would be learning and excelling in their academics. I was also aware of how impactful the building would be for the community.”

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With a hearty laughter, Mrs. Walsh-Reynolds tried her best to express her gratitude to the Helping Hands Jamaica Foundation, Mr. Nevin Lawson, Lady Jane's Haircuts For Men & Wicked Awesome Wishes and Food For The Poor for the building. “This building gives us the opportunity to serve the community on a wider scale. Due to the addition of the infant department building, we have employed two parents as janitorial staff. I feel a sense of accomplishment, it’s an amazing feeling when my babies no longer have to run in the rain to use the bathroom. They now have their own bathroom facilities that are age-appropriate and they deserve it. My students and teachers are now in their own space. I am just happy that the HHJF, donor partners and FFTP were able to give my students this opportunity. The playground is also a great gift, so much so that the primary school students always want to come over and play but we have to monitor that. Seeing the donors and other team members on site, was very impactful. It shows us three things, one, that somebody cares; two, that we matter and three, it shows the interest the team has in the lives of the students in Bois Content. They not only built this school, but they also interacted with the children and the community members. For every day they were with us, it was like one big family. I know my students appreciate this building because many of them, like myself I am from similar backgrounds and I can relate. I was very poor growing up, but a teacher believed in me, similar to these children, I needed someone to believe in me. With this building you have given me a better opportunity to do the same for my students. It is with these improvements that we have realised the importance of having a proper space.”

Mrs. Walsh-Reynolds followed up by saying, “When I came to Bois Content Primary, my plan was to make it a school of choice, and this is becoming more of a reality. Gifting us this building fuels my passion to push my students and teachers. I try my best to be as appreciative as possible. We cannot put a price on what the donors did for us, because we would not be able to afford this and we don’t take this gift for granted. I love my office with the bathroom; it is much bigger than what I was accustomed to so, I am able to perform my administrative duties more effectively and marking my lesson plans and budgeting are much easier. We are happy for the filing cabinets and furniture for the children. All classes were furnished through Food For The Poor. We also received an exercising machine to improve our wellness center. Our kitchen is not yet in use, because we were having some challenges with the stove but it was recently fixed so the hope is

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that we will use it soon. From time-to-time, we use the oven to bake. Lunch for the infants is provided by the primary school's kitchen. The computer room is not yet in use either because we are waiting on computers to outfit the room. I have sent letters soliciting computers from other non-government organizations."

She expressed appreciation by saying, "We are so grateful, and humbled! Wow! Words can't express how we feel. We all see how beautiful this building is. The smiles on the children's faces, shows that we are more than grateful and extremely happy. Without the donors and Food For The Poor, this would never have been possible. The children are more relaxed and comfortable. The bathroom is just down the hall. A big thanks again from the Bois Content Primary and Infant School family. We hope that this partnership will remain and blossom into bigger things. If we can even be of assistance to another school's project, we are more than willing to help."

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Ms. Nicole Gordon, class two Teacher and Supervisor for the infant department previously operated as the principal of the Bois Content Basic School, a position she held from 2011, until the merger in 2017. It is unclear of the exact date when the school started but Ms. Gordon said, “The desire to merge started long before I was principal, but unforeseen circumstances caused it to not happen. When the opportunity presented itself again in 2017, I was all in because I was thinking long-term and I knew the benefits would be better not only for the students but for me as well. I moved from Bois Content Basic School with only eight (8) students. The move was very necessary because at that time, I was the only teacher. In the latter days, it was a very difficult time, because I was trying my best to manage being a teacher and a student simultaneously. I left school at 2pm to get to my classes for 5pm in Kingston, on public transportation.”



Ms. Nicole Gordon is all smiles with her class two students who are very happy to be in their newly-constructed infant department.

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Sharing further details regarding her experience at the Bois Content Basic School, Ms. Gordon said, “Running the school on my own was draining in all aspects of life; financially, spiritually, and emotionally. It was very hard but with God all things are possible. My predecessor also had a hard time coping with the challenges and I was offered the position. I tried my best to work in my role. I started out with about 11 students and then the numbers increased to 22 students. I was able to hire another teacher and a cook. Unfortunately, the numbers began to decrease, and as a result, we discontinued the services of the cook. The other teacher and I tried our best to alternate in the kitchen but that ended because we could no longer manage.

I had some very supportive parents, so most of them were very understanding when we informed them that the students would have to take their own lunches to school. We didn’t have a refrigerator and we were also using a coal stove to cook at the time.

The building was dilapidated, and it was one big room divided by chalkboard. I sought support to renovate the building, but it was the best we could do at the time. I also used the same bathroom facilities as the students. We had flush toilets but because we do not have access to running water in the area, I had to use buckets to flush them. It was really hard to keep the bathroom area clean. Water was a challenge and there were days when we had no water in the tank. Depending on our financial status, we purchased water. Parents were also very inconsistent when it came to paying the tuition and that was what I used to operate the school as well as to cover my salary. We had no play equipment, except a few toys, so, the students would resort to entertaining themselves. On the outer part of the roof, wasps also surrounded the building and that was also very dangerous.”

Continuing she said, “With all those conditions, I wanted a stable environment. There were times when I got frustrated and wanted to give up so I honestly wanted someone who would motivate me and see my full potential, someone to help me become the best version of myself. With a boss like Mrs. Walsh-Reynolds, she has become that driving force I needed and I have received that motivation since beginning my tenure at the Bois Content Primary and Infant School.”

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After experiencing challenges while in the cramped classrooms, teaching by the primary school, Ms. Gordon shared that she was ecstatic when news broke that the school would be receiving an infant department, courtesy of Helping Hands Jamaica Foundation, NFL Cornerback Nevin Lawson, Lady Jane's Haircuts For Men & Wicked Awesome Wishes and Food For The Poor. “Our principal encouraged us to pray about getting through with a building at Food For The Poor and we did. Our prayers were successful and I was overjoyed because I knew we would be blessed with a building fully equipped for the infants. In September 2019 when we officially moved into our new building, we started out with 45 students, which was a big jump in the enrolment figure. My principal had a vision of growth and she told us to watch this growth become a reality. With that said we started to see a steady increase to the student population. At one point, I questioned her vision because I limited the number of students to the fact that it is a small community. But can I tell you, we have grown.”



The newly outfitted kitchen with a refrigerator and gas stove, at the infant department of the Bois Content Primary and Infant School.



With tears of joy Ms, Gordon said, “When I remember how far I am coming from and the struggles I endured over the years, I could not fight back the tears, when the building was completed. I remember being the only teacher responsible for all students before we merged and it was challenging. I tried my best to focus on the five-year-olds but the three and four-year olds really suffered. When we got the news that we were getting the building, I was like ‘Yes! Finally, something is happening.’ We all saw the vision and we were hungry for it. It was



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awesome. When we got the news that we would be receiving a computer lab, our own dining area and our own kitchen, I was overwhelmed. When our principal explained that workers would be coming and we would be receiving the building free of cost, I'm telling you, I was happy. The day of the ribbon cutting was an overwhelming feeling. The community on a whole was buzzing with excitement, because we have been waiting a long time for this to happen."

Continuing she said, "Mi nuh really bawly bawly enuh" which translates to 'I'm not a big crier' but when I toured the building, it was hard to hold back the tears. I was overwhelmed and still at a loss for words. To Helping Hands, Nevin Lawson, Lady Jane's Haircuts For Men & Wicked Awesome Wishes and Food For The Poor, a big thank you. Based on what I have been through, you wouldn't even know what your donations have done for me, the other teachers, the students, parents, and the community. You have done a great deed. We are told that Food For The Poor has now adopted us and we are so grateful. I love everything about this building. Again, I want to say a big thank you. Because of you we are trying to gain registration with the Early Childhood Commission. I am grateful for everything and for every opportunity we have been given. I hope you (donors and FFP) continue to assist school in need of assistance."

Daneki McCalla-Reader, the Caregiver for the infants at Bois Content Primary and Infant school, started working at the institution in 2018. In explaining her role, she said, "My duty is to assist the teachers with classroom activities and any other duty they need help with. WOW! I can clearly remember when taking the students to the bathroom was not an easy task, especially when it rained, because the bathrooms were not connected to the school."



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Explaining some of the challenges, Mrs. McCalla-Reader faced, she added, “When we operated by the primary school, we were in two classrooms which were small. When dealing with the babies, space is paramount to their development. The lack of space also contributed to the noise level, so if we were doing a singing activity, the teachers from other classes would sometimes ask us to keep down the noise. Activities that would cause the children to get too excited had to be reconsidered.”

“It was a happy feeling receiving the good news that we were selected to receive an infant department. “Words can’t explain how happy we were feeling. It was a good experience from the start of the project to the handing over ceremony. We were able to interact with the donors and watching them participate in the construction was like a big family get together. It was a beautiful experience to watch. Seeing the donors in person, was an unexplainable and joyful feeling knowing that they didn’t just send the money but they gifted us with their presence, time and physical strength.”



Mrs. Daneki McCalla-Reader is happy to be supervising the students whether it be in the classroom or on the playground.



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Similar to other teachers, Mrs. McCalla-Reader is happy to have the bathrooms and other areas of the school under one roof. She also loves that the students have their own play area. “Most times, the children played inside, because outside was not always ideal for them and also because their lunch time was the same as the primary school students. Although it was dangerous for them to play inside with the furniture, we tried to keep them as entertained and as safe as possible during playtime. Back then, they mostly used building blocks. Now our infants are free to play outside because they have their own play area and they are also free to be as loud and expressive as they can.”

As a community member, Mrs. McCalla-Reader said, “I can say that everyone in the area is happy to see the school’s improvement. Past students are overjoyed. I am a product of the Bois Content Basic School. I can’t remember my experience back then, however from what I remember as an adult, this new structure is a great improvement. The previous building, consisted of outside pit latrines and learning enhancement equipment was not as accessibly, so we are grateful for the change. We have a much better building here and we have all the necessary tools to enhance learning and development for the infants. For example, we have big visible learning corners and we can erect our charts.”



The bathrooms at Bois Content Infant Department are outfitted with age appropriate toilet bowls and hand wash sinks.

“Since the use of the new building, I have seen much improvement by the infants, they are more settled and happier. To have our own space, is a feeling second to none, because we have the ability to organize the space and transform it into the teaching and learning environment we envisioned for years. Experiencing the building for the first time was an exciting moment. All of us as teachers were very eager to begin teaching. There are no words to express how thankful we are but for now, the words I can say is ‘thank you’. To show our gratitude, we will treat this school building with the utmost respect and care. Thank you very much.”

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Ms. Carlett Bedward assisting one of her students in her spacious classroom, donated by the Helping Hands Foundation.

Carlett Bedward, an Assistant Teacher currently studying to become a trained Teacher, is responsible for the 3-year-olds at the Bois Content Infant Department. Her teaching journey at Bois Content Basic School ended early due to health complications. Re-entering the teaching profession, Ms. Bedward taught at the Crawl Pen Basic School for two years, until September 2017 when the school merged with the Bois Content Basic School and became the infant department of the Bois Content Primary and Infant School.

Sharing her experience at Crawl Pen Basic School, Ms. Bedward said, “Teaching at Crawl Pen was bearable. We had a large number of students and majority of them were performing above their age level. We didn’t have a big space and the classrooms were small but we tried to cater to the needs of the students as best as we could. For toilets, we used pit latrines, with modern toilet seat covers. This made the bathroom facility more presentable and easier to keep clean. The bathrooms were also not attached to the school, so whenever it rained it was difficult to take the children to the bathroom. Before the merger, we had an enrolment figure of approximately 40 students and I was responsible for the 3-year olds.”

When stakeholders met to discuss the merger, Ms. Bedward was in doubt about her teaching future because although the dream to merge the 20-year-old Crawl Pen Basic School had been one for the then Principal at Crawl Pen, Ms. Bedward’s superior did not continue with the team, she instead transitioned into retirement. Thankfully Ms. Bedward

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was given the opportunity to receive a position as a teacher at the new Bois Content Infant Department.

Sharing about life after the merger Ms. Bedward said, “I started assisting with the three and four-year-olds when our schools merged. We started operations in 2017 with an enrolment figure ranging in the 20s. While some of our students matriculated to Grade One, others went on to other infant schools. We are extremely happy that some parents stayed with us because unlike Crawl Pen, no school fee is required at the Bois Content Infant Department. Our current location is also closer to the community and the parents appreciate that.”

While operating by the primary school, Ms. Bedward shared similar views about teaching in a section at the primary school as well as what it meant to benefit from the designated infant department.

The day news broke that Food For The Poor would be visiting the school, Ms. Bedward recalls how excited she was. She said, “From day one Mrs. Reynolds, our principal, has been dreaming of us having our own infant department and so our expectations were high. She was always pushing for us to be in a secure and comfortable environment. When we heard the good news we were excited and anxious, because our dream of having our own space was becoming a reality. I was teaching summer school, when the equipment came. I witnessed the entire process, from the first day of construction, when the bus arrived with the volunteers, to the ribbon cutting ceremony. They worked so fast and it was fun and amazing. It was great to see everyone working as a team. Some were painting, others nailing, it was really exciting, and I must repeat how impressed I was with how fast they worked. When the parents and other community members saw the buses arriving, they walked to the construction site with the buses because they too were excited.

The night prior to the day of the opening ceremony, I could not sleep because I was so anxious. When the day finally came, I felt the joy emanating from everyone, especially from our principal, Mrs. Walsh-Reynolds. This was a great accomplishment for her because it’s something she had been working on for years. The parents were very excited,

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and they were spreading the news about the new and beautiful building, so everyone wanted to see it.”

The good news quickly spread and neighbouring community members were at the school looking at the newly-constructed building. Ms. Bedward added, “Parents were saying, ‘the infant department is very spacious and beautiful.’ They were excited about us having four (4) classrooms and a computer room.”

When the building was completed, Ms. Bedward said the teachers started moving into the new building the day before they were officially scheduled to move because they were that excited. To the donors, Ms. Bedward remarked. “We are happy that our wish was granted. This new department is a blessing. I want to add that we are receiving more students because of the merger and the beautiful building. Now, we can facilitate more students, as we provide a safer environment for our infants. We have a sick bay, which we didn’t have before. At the primary school, all we had was a bed in the corner in the bigger classroom. Because of you (HHJF partners and FFP), we have a water tank, and a rainwater harvesting system, which we are grateful for. We do not have piped water in our community, so we depend on harvested rainwater and trucked water to survive. Having this big water tank makes it easier for us to flush the toilets and wash our hands.

When it rains, we are able to
time we



The tank that harvests the rainwater,
which is piped to the bathrooms.

catch a large volume of water. The only struggle with water issues is during the drought but as long as we have rain, our water challenges are non-existent. This means school no longer needs to be dismissed early because of water issues. We conserve as best as we can. Hopefully we can get a few more tanks to combat the possibilities of a drought.”

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Ms. Carlett Bedward assisting a female student who is all smiles at the hand wash sink in the bathroom.

Continuing she said, “I am grateful for this building. At Bois Content Primary and Infant School, we believe in a student-centred classroom and without this building we could not facilitate that mandate. We are very grateful for you (donors and FFP). Thank you very much for giving us this opportunity. The students are now in a safe, student-friendly environment and learning can take place much easier. We are happy for this department because we know that the Early Childhood Commission has twelve (12) standards that we should meet and because of Nevin Lawson, Lady Jane's Haircuts For Men & Wicked Awesome Wishes, Helping Hands Jamaica Foundation and Food For The Poor, we are able to meet all the requirements, especially with the grill and fencing; we have a safe and secure building. We have a nicely equipped playground where our students are free

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to play. This playground facilitates growth and development of the infants. The space in the classrooms is also a great asset, that will contribute to the infants' growth and development while learning interacting skills.”

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Unlike the other teachers, Ms. Lara Heron has no experience with the merger. Entering the institution as a trained teacher, she is approaching her second year (2020) of teaching at the Bois Content Infant Department. “I came here when the infants were housed at a section in the primary section school. I, along with another teacher, were responsible for two classes in one room, the three and four year olds, because we were out of space. To ensure we were reaching all students, I had to prepare lessons that would cater to both age groups. Although the conditions were not conducive, teaching has never been a struggle for me.”



Ms. Lara Heron giving her students an activity before lunch, where they will get to enjoy the newly installed play equipment.

For Ms. Heron, back then, “The space was limited, and students were clustered and miserable. Noise control was a challenge because at one point, there were about 30 students in my class. It was difficult to keep them quiet especially when the primary school students were having exams. We usually want them to be interactive during the lessons and it was hard to do that with the space constraints. Most of play time was spent inside the classrooms, because taking them outside would cause them to have possible harmful interactions with the older students, especially because the entire school shared the same lunch time. The children would at times complain about not being able to go outside. So, on this spot of ground where the school is now built, from time-to-time, I

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took them out to play ball games or practice for sports day, but I had to monitor them heavily.”

Continuing to share the challenges, Ms. Heron said, “Taking them to the bathroom was a dreaded task in the past. I tried to take them in groups but then when you return with one group there is always one child who needs you to go back to the bathroom with them.



Since they are babies, this would interrupt for long periods.”



after breaking

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For Ms. Heron, moving has been one of the best gifts the infant department has received. “I have taught in a number of schools and I have the best principal ever, because she has a vision. We have more space, the lighting and ventilation is much better. I love dancing with my students, so I am loving the space we have to do these activities. Sometimes I feel silly doing these activities, but it really does help the children. I remember doing a fire drill, where the students had to ‘stop, drop and roll’ as part of the training/lesson before we moved. It was very restricting but now, we have a big space to do as much activities as we want to. Having our own space is much better. The bathrooms are much closer, we can send the children on their own and then check on them. I also use the play area as a motivator, although it may not always work. When they haven’t been on the play equipment for a while, it pushes them to be more settled and work harder in class, so they can go outside to play. Seeing the students on the playground is an awesome feeling and they have the freedom to play in their own space. The only thing that we have to continue doing is teaching them how to take turns on each play equipment. The bathroom is different and much better than what we had before. The bathrooms that we used by the primary school were all the way to the back of the school. The security fencing gives us an environment where we can be at ease when the students are outside. The ramp is also very good because it means that if we have a child who is unable to use the steps, they can easily access the ramp.”

Talking about the construction period and moving over to the new school, Ms. Heron said, “When I heard that FFTP and partners was coming, I was overjoyed, excited and very eager for construction to start. When construction finally began, we were all giving God thanks. When we saw the donors...wow! and then when I saw how fast they were working, I said, ‘Yes! We will be moving in September.’ The other teachers and I started planning how we’d set up our classrooms. When we were by the primary school we were restricted in terms of what we could mount on walls because whenever there was a function we would have to take down all our charts and other teaching aids. The day we moved was so easy because the place was fresh, and everything was all new. It didn’t require us to do a lot of cleaning. The transition was beautiful; the most challenging thing was to decide on how we were going to set up the different learning corners. We had corners when we were by the primary school, but they would all overlap.”

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Saying thanks, Ms. Heron said, “I want to say ‘thank you’ to the donors, (Helping Hands Jamaica Foundation, and Mr. Nevine Lawson, Lady Jane's Haircuts For Men & Wicked Awesome Wishes) as well as to the Food For The Poor family. We appreciate your efforts, we are overjoyed and excited to have our space. I am at a loss for words when I think about what I want to say. When I saw how fast, interactive and polite you all (donors), were, it showed that you (donors) really wanted to help and that is something we really appreciate. Some of our children are less fortunate. There are students here who were not familiar with using a flush toilet because they use a pit latrine at home. For this exposure and this opportunity to have the infants in a comfortable school environment, we are grateful. The parents and community members love the school. I remember one parent said to our principal ‘you can never leave.’ And that is because of the vision, she has. For 2019/2020 school year, our theme is ‘Going above and beyond, building stronger partnerships.’ We take this very literal, and with this building, you have given us a better opportunity to put our children first. We will continue to go above and beyond and operate like a family to ensure we are producing excellent students. This building is a blessing. Some of our students are not coming from a stable home so we want to ensure they are comfortable here at their home away from home.”

-END-